Sepher Yetzirah Magic

Magic and Meditations derived from the first and greatest Qabalistic Work

David Rankine

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INTRODUCTION

Modern magical Qabalah, as with so many magical traditions, has changed greatly from its roots (in Jewish Kabbalah).[1] I say changed not evolved, as the common presentation of Qabalah has narrowed its focus to such an extent as to exclude a huge body of significant works and material, and in so doing losing many useful techniques, ideas and perspectives.

As with many other magicians, my study of Qabalah began with works such as Fortune's *Mystical Qabalah* and Mathers' *Kabbalah Denudata*. The former work and Mathers' lengthy introduction to the latter, combined with the correspondence tables popularized by Crowley in *777*, have become the corpus of most modern Qabalah, centred around the glyph of the Tree of Life, and with an excessive focus on 'path-working' (i.e. guided meditations of inner mental landscapes).[2]

Ongoing study inevitably leads back to earlier Kabbalistic texts, such as the Zohar, Bahir and *Sepher Yetzirah*. The *Sepher Yetzirah*[3] is particularly important, not only for the wealth and quality of its text, but also in that it predates other Kabbalistic writings by many centuries, being the first known work on Kabbalah. Studying such texts opens a panoramic perspective from the narrow focus of modern Qabalah, and this work is offered with this in mind.

In his *Commentary on the Sefer Yetsira*, Isaac the Blind (1160-1236 CE), one of the great Kabbalists, describes language as the way to retrace the path of emanation, i.e. the use of the Hebrew letters as a method of accessing the divine. Shem Tov (1698-1760 CE) also writes on this divine association to the letters in his *Commentary on the Sefirot*, 'It should be said concerning the letters engraved on the tablets by the hand of God that the divine potency engraves these letters and gives them the form through which he will perform miracles and these letters receive their force from the divine powers which they represent.'[4]

Language is the liminal medium which unites emanation and manifestation.[5] The divine force is given form in written language, the glyphs of letters being divine forms which act as receptacles of divine force.

The expression of spoken language activates this divine force in innumerable permutations, where this force-form duality of sound mirrors the wave-particle duality of light.[6] This interconnection recalls Genesis 1:3, 'And God said, "Let there be light."'

If, like Shem Tov, we perceive language as a divine conduit, then conjuration, prayer, mantra, song and ritual intonation all become pathways to the divine, both within and without. We engage in ritual practices which put us in a liminal state, commonly expressed symbolically by the crossroads, and there we vocalise, or emanate, the divine force of language to achieve desired changes. In ritual we can be said to 'Stop at the crossroads, look and ask for the ancient paths.'[7]

Following on from these observations, I suggest that many of the techniques for using the Hebrew letters are essentially theurgic in nature, as they seek to connect to the ineffable divine, and to do this they first draw on and then work to transcend the limits of the intellect-mind. If you have experienced a profound mystical state, you will know the impossibility of expressing that state in language – the letters are ancient paths, but divine bliss is the journey's end.

Letter	Hebrew	Meaning	English	Number
Aleph	א	Ox	A	1
Beth	ב	House	B	2
Gimel	ג	Camel	G	3
Daleth	ד	Door	D	4
Heh	ה	Window	H, E, A	5
Vav	ו	Nail	V, U, O	6
Zain	ז	Sword	Z	7
Cheth	ח	Window	Ch	8
Teth	ט	Snake	T	9
Yod	י	Hand	I, J, Y	10
Kaph	כ (final)ך	Palm (of hand)	K	20 (500)
Lamed	ל	Ox-goad	L	30
Mem	מ (final)ם	Water	M	40 (600)
Nun	נ (final)ן	Fish	N	50 (700)
Samekh	ס	Prop	S	60
Ayin	ע	Eye	Aa, O	70
Peh	פ (final)ף	Mouth	P, Ph	80 (800)
Tzaddi	צ (final)ץ	Fish-hook	Tz	90 (900)
Qoph	ק	Back of Head	Q	100
Resh	ר	Head	R	200
Shin	ש	Tooth	Sh	300
Tav	ת	Cross	Th	400

[1] A note on spellings: Kabbalah is commonly used for the Jewish mystical system, Qabalah for the modern magical variant, and Cabalah for the Christianised form of either.

[2] An example of the dilution of Qabalah is the presentation in a lot of modern works of path-working as astral projection, which may benefit the ego of the practitioner but is entirely erroneous, as it focuses on exploring inner mental landscapes through the symbol set of Qabalah.

[3] As with many grimoires, there are different recensions of the *Sepher Yetzirah* over time, and it should be considered a body of work rather than one single text. In this book I draw on material from several recensions. In Hebrew this is commonly written as *Sefer Yetsira*, and both spellings will be used in this work depending on context. The abbreviation *SY* will be used for quotations from the texts.

[4] Underlining mine for emphasis.

[5] "Air from Spirit: he carved and hewed in it the twenty-two basic letters" SY 1:11.

[6] The significance of this concept as central to the *Sepher Yetzirah* is emphasized in its very first verse – 'He created his universe with three groups of letters with numbers and with speech' – indicating the written and spoken form of language as divine creation.

[7] Jeremiah 6:16.

The Hebrew Alphabet

‘Twenty-two Foundation Letters:
Three Mothers,
Seven Doubles
And twelve Simples [Elementals].’[1]

The Hebrew alphabet is a script of great beauty and expressiveness. To really delve into the Qabalah (and Kabbalah), and hew out the gems of wisdom within, it is necessary to prepare yourself with at least a basic knowledge of the Hebrew alphabet.

The Hebrew alphabet comprises twenty-two letters, which are usually divided into three groups. These are the three Mother Letters, the seven Double Letters, and the twelve Single Letters, also known as Elemental Letters. These groups correspond to the three elements,[2] the seven classical planets and the twelve zodiacal signs.

However, the letters may also be divided into five groups based on the way they are spoken, as indicated in the *Sepher Yetzirah*. These are the Gutturals (in the throat), the Palatals (in the palate), the Linguals (in the tongue), the Dentals (in the teeth) and the Labials (in the lips).[3]

“Twenty-two Foundation Letters
He engraved them with voice
He carved them with breath
He set them in the mouth
In five places
Aleph Cheth Heh Ayin in the throat
Gimel Yod Kaph Qoph in the palate
Daleth Teth Lamed Nun Tav in the tongue
Zain Samekh Shin Resh Tzaddi in the teeth
Beth Vav Mem Peh in the lips.”[4]

Type	Mother	Double	Single
Guttural	Aleph		Heh, Cheth, Ayin
Palatal		Gimel, Kaph	Yod, Qoph
Lingual		Daleth, Tav	Teth, Lamed, Nun
Dental	Shin	Resh	Zain, Samekh, Tzaddi
Labial	Mem	Beth, Peh	Vav

It is significant that each group is represented in the first word of the Torah, i.e. Berashith (BRAShITh), 'in the beginning'. It is comprised of Beth (Labial), Resh (Dental), Aleph (Guttural), Shin (Dental), Yod (Palatal) and Tav (Lingual). Thus the whole of speech is represented by the first creative word of the Torah.

Each Hebrew letter has a meaning and an associated number. The numbers associated with the letters provide the means for the techniques of Gematria used with the Qabalah.[5] This number-letter association almost certainly springs from the Greek influence on early Kabbalah, as the Greeks had alphabetic numerals from around the eighth century BCE, centuries before the first known Kabbalistic texts.[6]

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[1] SY 1:2.

[2] Air, Fire and Water. Earth is often considered separately.

[3] It is worth observing that this linguistic division through phonetic pronunciation has been suggested as evidence of a Sanskrit influence on the *Sepher Yetzirah* from texts discussing the same dating back to at least 500 BCE. Shulman (2002) postulates the transmission of such through Hellenic Alexandria to northern Mesopotamia during the time of the second Jewish captivity. This is an intriguing notion but not within the scope of this present work.

[4] SY 2:3.

[5] See *Climbing the Tree of Life*, Rankine, 2005, ch.27, 'The Magick of Numbers'.

[6] For more on this see the excellent work *The Greek Qabalah*, Kieren Barry, 1999.

The Three Mother Letters

‘Three Mothers, Aleph Mem Shin
Mem hums, Shin hisses
And Aleph is the breath of air deciding between them.’[1]

The three Mother Letters are Aleph, Mem and Shin, which symbolise Air, Water and Fire respectively. They are implied in the beginning of Genesis in the second and third verses. Aleph is the divine breath as ‘the Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters.’[2] The waters are Mem, the second mother letter. The third letter, Shin [fire] is implied by the next line, ‘And God said: “Let there be light”’ and there was light.”[3] This attribution to the verses in the first chapter of Genesis may be seen for the rest of the letters and the Sephiroth.

They are called Mother Letters because they are assigned in Kabbalistic models to the cross-paths, which represent the balance of opposing principles and unite them. They are also called ‘Mothers’ because these paths all form crossroads, and a crossroad is a ‘Mother of the road’.[4] Additionally, in Proverbs it says ‘You shall call Understanding a Mother’,[5] referring to Binah (Understanding), whose numeration is three, the number of Mother Letters.

As the Elemental powers, the three Mother Letters also symbolise the three states to be overcome to enter profound meditative states for visions, i.e. ‘the stormy wind’ (Aleph), ‘the great cloud’ (Mem) and ‘the flashing fire’ (Shin).[6] This is made clear in Ezekiel, where it says, ‘I looked, and behold, a stormy wind coming from the north, a great cloud and flashing fire, and a glow round about it, and from its midst, the vision of the speaking silence, in the midst of the fire.’[7]

Ezekiel’s vision must first pass through the stormy wind, i.e. stormy *Ruach*, corresponding to the distractions and agitations experienced when you begin meditating. Next comes the great cloud, which corresponds to the loss of focus where the mind wanders. Finally there is the flashing fire,

which is the overabundance of imagery, where the mind is overwhelmed with images rather than controlling them.

When these three states have been overcome, then you can experience the glow, *Nogah*. *Nogah* is also used to denote dusk and twilight, the times when Venus is visible in the sky, and indeed can also mean Venus, i.e. Netzach (Victory), and so a victory is achieved over the mental distractions, winning through to the speaking silence (*Chasmal*).

The speaking silence is the state of inner quiet where the internal dialogue has been quieted (silence),[8] and the voice that speaks is not your own, but rather the wisdom you receive from the meditation (speaking).

Significantly, *Chasmal* has the Mother Letters Shin and Mem in the centre of it, corresponding to the Sephiroth of Binah and Chokmah, Understanding and Wisdom. Together they make the word *Shem*, meaning 'The Name', and the outer two letters (Cheth and Lamed) make the word *Chel*, meaning 'to make a hole'. Thus the speaking silence (*Chasmal*) can literally be seen as the hole in consciousness made by the Name (of God).

The three Mother Letters are usually taken as representing the three cross paths on the Tree of Life in Kabbalah. Thus Shin joins Chokmah to Binah, Aleph joins Chesed to Geburah, and Mem joins Netzach to Hod. If we include here the fact that Aleph is a silent vowel, seen as representing the inhalation of breath, then looking down the Tree we see the word *Shem* (*Shin Mem*), 'The Name'.

This is important because from this comes the Three Fathers, the three letters taken as corresponding to the three pillars, which are Yod, Heh and Vav, the three components of Tetragrammaton. From the Three Mothers are born the Three Fathers. Where the Tetragrammaton is the Divine Name which is the ultimate expression of the divine in the universe as we know it, so the Divine Name in the universe when it was chaos (*Tohu*) was comprised of the Mother Letters. As the universe was born from Chaos, so too are the Fathers born from the Mothers.

The Mother Letters taken in sequence form the word *Emesh* (AMSh), meaning 'yesternight' or 'gloom'. Yesternight implies a sense of past, what went before, and this is hinted at in this context in Genesis where it says 'You slept last night [*emesh*] with my father.'[9] The other use is seen later in

Job, where it says 'Gloom [*emesh*], waste and desolation.'[10] This verse refers to the Chaos that existed before creation.

The development of the universe from the chaos is expressed in the verse:

> 'Three Mothers, AMSh, in the Universe are air, water, fire.
> Heaven was created from fire
> Earth was created from water
> And air from Breath decides between them.'[11]

It has also been suggested that *Emesh* was used as a Divine Name, which is understandable considering the importance of the Mother Letters. Thus we see in Genesis 'And Emesh gave judgement'.[12] Also Genesis 31:29, usually read as 'The God of your fathers last night [*emesh*] said to me', could just as correctly be read as 'The God of your fathers, Emesh, said to me'.[13]

When the Mother Letters are reversed they make the word *Shema* (ShMA), meaning 'The Name', which can be seen as the Tetragrammaton as the Divine Name which permeates the universe.

The three elemental powers represented by the Mother Letters also represent the three Pillars of the Tree of Life. So as well as the Father Letters, the Mother Letters can also on another level be seen as corresponding to the Pillars. Thus Mem, as water, also indicates the Pillar of Water (Mercy), Shin, as Fire, also indicates the Pillar of Fire (Severity), and Aleph, as Air, the Middle Pillar between them.

From Mem (water) is born Yod, which corresponds to Chokmah, heading the Pillar of Water. From Shin (fire) is born Heh, which corresponds to Binah, heading the Pillar of Fire. From Aleph is born Vav, corresponding to the Sephiroth of Construction.

Other triads of associations are attributed to the Mother Letters.[14] Most important of these are the divisions of space, time and spirit (soul). Shin (fire) is associated with summer, Mem (water) with winter, and Aleph (air) with spring and autumn, the balance between the two of them. In the soul Shin is associated with the *Neshamah*, Aleph with the *Ruach* and Mem with the *Nephesh*.

In time Aleph (Breath, Air) represents the past, Mem (Water) the present and Shin (Fire) the future. This can be seen from Genesis where 'the breath of God [*Ruach Elohim*] hovered on the face of the water',[15] and is the first element referred to. Also in the *Sepher Yetzirah* we see 'water from breath',[16] indicating the birth of present (water) from past (breath). The next verse continues this sequence with 'fire from water',[17] indicating the birth of future from present.

Meditation on the Speaking Silence

That the word Shem is the centre of *Chasmal* is significant, as it recalls the phrase 'Mem hums, Shin hisses' from the *Sepher Yetzirah*.[18] As these letters correspond to the primal forces of the Sephiroth of Chokmah and Binah, they can be used in meditation on the upper Tree. Chasmal is described as 'the interface between the physical and the spiritual'.[19]

Chokmah corresponds to the left side of the face and water, and Binah to the right side of the face and fire. So place two pieces of coloured A4 paper or card on the ground in front of you, a blue sheet to the left and a red sheet to the right.

Start intoning *Chasmal* (Ha-Sh-Mal) as a mantra, and alternate the opening and closing of your eyes thus: for the first part of the mantra close your left eye (*Hash*) and then close the right eye and open the left eye for the second part of the mantra (*Mal*). Thus you will be focusing on the red sheet for fire (Shin, Binah) and the blue sheet for water (Mem, Chokmah). Continue doing this for several minutes or until your consciousness shifts to a state where you no longer register anything except the divine unity.

Meditation on the Scales of Balance

Verse 2:1 of the *Sepher Yetzirah* introduces an important concept whose roots may come from ancient Egypt from the weighing of the heart of the deceased soul against the feather of truth on the scales of Maat, goddess of truth and balance. It states:

'The Three Mothers are Aleph Mem Shin, their foundation is a pan of merit, a pan of liability, and the tongue of decree deciding between them. Mem hums, Shin hisses, and Aleph is the Breath of air deciding between them.'[20]

Mem represents the pan of merit, Shin the pan of liability, and Aleph the fulcrum and pointer (tongue of decree) in the centre. To contextualize the meditation, it is necessary to consider the meaning of two of the words in this verse. The word used here for 'pan' is *Kaph*, which is also the palm of the hand. The word for 'tongue' is *Lashon*, which is normally used for the tongue in the mouth. From these meanings comes the technique for this meditation.

Facing East, stand straight with your arms outstretched and straight to the sides, so you make a cross. Your left hand represents the pan of merit and your right the pan of liability; your body is the fulcrum. Visualise yourself as the scales of balance made by these letters.

If you wish to improve a good quality in yourself (merit) or a situation, hum Mem as a mantra ('Mem hums') for several minutes whilst visualising the letter Mem in white (symbolising the White Pillar) in your left hand and concentrating on the quality. Slowly move your left arm down, and your right arm correspondingly up, to show the balance tipping in favour of the merit. Do this slowly to an angle of up to 30°. Hold this position and continue humming Mem for several more minutes, ending when you can no longer hold the position, by concentrating on your breathing and returning your arms to the horizontal.

If you wish to redress a mistake or bad behaviour you have made (liability), hiss Shin as a mantra ('Shin hisses') for several minutes whilst visualising the letter Shin in black (symbolising the Black Pillar) in your

right hand and focusing on the behavior or mistake. Slowly move your right arm down and your left arm correspondingly up to an angle of up to 30° to show your acknowledgement of your mistake. Then change this pattern by just concentrating on your breathing ('Aleph is the Breath of air deciding between them'). Then return to humming Mem as a mantra for several minutes, slowly moving your arms back to the horizontal.

These meditations can be performed once or repeated as often as you feel necessary to achieve the desired effect. The initial posture for both meditations is facing East, standing straight with your arms outstretched horizontally forming a cross.

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[1] SY 2:1.

[2] Genesis 1:2.

[3] Genesis 1:3.

[4] Ezekiel 21:26.

[5] Proverbs 2:3.

[6] Zohar 2.81a, 2.131a, 2.203a, 3.227a.

[7] Ezekiel 1:4.

[8] The state known in Yoga as *dharana*.

[9] Genesis 19:34.

[10] Job 30:3.

[11] SY 3:4.

[12] Genesis 31:43.

[13] Genesis 31:29.

[14] SY 3:5-9.

[15] Genesis 1:2.

[16] SY 1:11.

[17] SY 1:12.

[18] SY 2:1.

[19] *Sepher Yetzirah: The Book of Creation*, Kaplan, 1997:98.

[20] SY 2:1.

The Seven Double Letters

The Double Letters are so called because they are the letters which can be pronounced in two ways. Thus for each letter there is a hard and a soft sound. This is explained in the *Sepher Yetzirah*:

> ‘Seven Doubles:
> Beth, Gimel, Daleth, Kaph, Peh, Resh, Tav.
> They direct themselves with two tongues …
> A structure of soft and hard, strong and weak.’[1]

When the letters are to be pronounced as hard sounds, they are written with a dot in the middle of the letter, which is called a *Dagesh*. In early texts a horizontal line was written above the letters to indicate a soft sound, and this is called a *Rafeh*. The second pronunciation of Resh has been lost and is no longer known.

Traditionally the seven Doubles are attributed to the seven classical planets, the seven days of the week and the seven openings in the head as described in the *Sepher Yetzirah*:

> ‘Seven Doubles: ….
> And with them He formed,
> Seven planets in the Universe,
> Seven days in the Year,
> Seven gates in the Soul, male and female.’[2]

In Kabbalah the Doubles can be corresponded to the seven lower Sephiroth below the abyss, as the end-points of the seven vertical paths, which is their main attribution. Although these attributions differ from those in modern Qabalah (and note especially the colour differences), this does not diminish their value when used within Kabbalah and *Sepher Yetzirah* derived practices.

Running and Returning Consecration

The phrase ‘Running and Returning’ is found in verse 1:4, and is originally derived from the Book of Ezekiel, ‘The ten Sefirot are the basis; restrain your heart from thinking; restrain your mouth from speaking. And if your heart races return to the place where you started and remember that it is written: And the living creatures ran and returned [Ezekiel 1:14]. And concerning this matter a covenant was made.’

It is also seen in 1:8, ‘The ten sefirot are the basis. Their appearance is like the sight of lightning, and their end? – they have no limit. And his word is in them [the Sefirot] as though running and returning, and they pursue his command like the storm wind, and before his throne they bow down.’

This verse is striking, as lightning can be said to run and return. An equalization of charge between sky and ground causes a lightning strike, but the flash seen by the human eye is the return stroke. So the lightning literally runs and returns! Add in the reference to the storm wind, and the fact that thunderstorms always have lightning, and it provides the context for this technique.

The words ‘restrain your mouth from speaking’ clearly indicate no vocalization, not pronouncing divine names, chants or other letters aloud. Furthermore, being mindful that Binah was equated to the heart, ‘restrain your heart from thinking’ can be seen as a further instruction. This instruction is to have no internal dialogue. The technique given here is used for consecrating planetary items, such as talismans and amulets.

Stand facing the direction associated with the letter. Have your talisman or amulet located on a flat surface in front of you (altar or table).[3] Relax your arms so they are hanging loosely by your side, and have your feet slightly apart so that they are directly underneath your shoulders. Close your eyes and in your mind’s eye see a stormy night sky, black, pitted with tiny silver stars. Visualise the Hebrew letter in its appropriate colour above the talisman (or amulet) in front of you. See a lightning flash appear from the letter up to the sky as you silently intone the hard (running) form of the letter, and then silently intone the soft (returning) form of the letter as you see the lightning flash return from the sky to the letter, imbued with the

planetary force. Repeat this for a decent period of time (10-15 minutes) until the letter is brilliantly coloured and emanating planetary force, and then see it sink into the talisman (or amulet), charging it with that planetary force. Open your eyes and wrap the charged talisman (or amulet) in an appropriately coloured cloth of a natural material such as cotton or silk ready for use.

Letter	**Hebrew**	**Planet**	**Colour**	**Direc-tion**	**Running (Hard)**	**Returning (Soft)**
Beth	ב	Moon	White	South	B	V
Gimel	ג	Mars	Red	North	G	J
Daleth	ד	Sun	Yellow	East	D	DTh (like breadth)
Kaph	כ	Venus	Light Pink[37]	Up	K	cK (like hack)
Peh	פ	Merc.	Dark Pink[38]	Down	P	F
Resh	ר	Saturn	Black	West	R	R
Tav	ת	Jupiter	Blue	Centre	T	dTh (like width)

Meditation Using the Doubles to Attract Qualities

The Double Letters are associated both with qualities and with directions, and these can be combined in meditations to attract the qualities into your life. A reference to this is found in the Talmud, where it says, 'He who wishes wisdom, let him face south; He who wishes wealth, let him face north.'

Letter	Quality	Negative	Direction	Day	Body
Beth	Wisdom	Folly	South	Sunday	Right Eye
Gimel	Wealth, Love	Poverty	North	Monday	Right Ear
Daleth	Seed, Children	Desolation	East	Tuesday	Right Nostril
Kaph	Life, Health	Death	Up	Wednesday	Left Eye
Peh	Dominance, Advancement	Subjugation	Down	Thursday	Left Ear
Resh	Peace – Internal/ External	War	West	Friday	Left Nostril
Tav	Grace, Attractiveness	Ugliness	Centre	Saturday	Mouth

On the appropriate planetary hour (and preferably the appropriate day), face the appropriate direction and vibrate the soft form of the letter repeatedly, whilst concentrating on the quality you wish to attract. Visualise the letter in front of you in white flame, becoming more and more intense as the quality is attracted into it. After a few minutes vibrating the letter and seeing it get ever brighter, draw the now brilliant letter into your body through the area of the body associated with the letter (all of which are in the

head), and travelling in your body to your heart. Feel the energy of the letter spreading from your heart throughout your body. When you have finished join your hands in the prayer position in front of your heart. The strengthening of the qualities in you will occur over time with this practice. It can be performed daily if the appropriate planetary hour is observed.

The soft form is that associated with ‘Returning’, i.e. drawing the quality to you. If you were to use the hard form of the letter instead of the soft form, it would be to transmit the negative quality (i.e. ‘Running’ from you) at a target person or organization.[4] In this instance the empowered letter would be directed at the target, and if this were an organization some imagination would be required to find a suitable equivalent to the entry point in the head.

A Note on Timings

Early Talmudic and Kabbalistic texts emphasise the importance of planetary hours for performing Kabbalistic work.[5] This is even more significant than the planetary day, though the combination of both is preferable. The sequence of hours used with the *Sepher Yetzirah* is the same as found in Renaissance works and which has become the standard set of planetary attributions. There is one major difference however, where the planetary hours are kept as full hours rather than adjusted for equal amounts of light and dark, and the day starts at 6am as a specific point rather than sunrise, based on calculations of the creation of the planets from the Torah. As with the standardized set of planetary hours found in modern magic, the first hour of each planetary day is ruled by its planet.

Day Hour	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
6am	Merc.	Jupiter	Venus	Saturn	Sun	Moon	Mars
7am	Moon	Mars	Merc.	Jupiter	Venus	Saturn	Sun
8am	Saturn	Sun	Moon	Mars	Merc.	Jupiter	Venus
9am	Jupiter	Venus	Saturn	Sun	Moon	Mars	Merc.
10am	Mars	Merc.	Jupiter	Venus	Saturn	Sun	Moon
11am	Sun	Moon	Mars	Merc.	Jupiter	Venus	Saturn
Noon	Venus	Saturn	Sun	Moon	Mars	Merc.	Jupiter
1pm	Merc.	Jupiter	Venus	Saturn	Sun	Moon	Mars
2pm	Moon	Mars	Merc.	Jupiter	Venus	Saturn	Sun
3pm	Saturn	Sun	Moon	Mars	Merc.	Jupiter	Venus
4pm	Jupiter	Venus	Saturn	Sun	Moon	Mars	Merc.
5pm	Mars	Merc.	Jupiter	Venus	Saturn	Sun	Moon
Night							
6pm	Sun	Moon	Mars	Merc.y	Jupiter	Venus	Saturn
7pm	Venus	Saturn	Sun	Moon	Mars	Merc.	Jupiter
8pm	Merc.	Jupiter	Venus	Saturn	Sun	Moon	Mars
9pm	Moon	Mars	Merc.	Jupiter	Venus	Saturn	Sun
10pm	Saturn	Sun	Moon	Mars	Merc.	Jupiter	Venus
11pm	Jupiter	Venus	Saturn	Sun	Moon	Mars	Merc.
Mid.	Mars	Merc.	Jupiter	Venus	Saturn	Sun	Moon
1am	Sun	Moon	Mars	Merc.	Jupiter	Venus	Saturn
2am	Venus	Saturn	Sun	Moon	Mars	Merc.	Jupiter
3am	Merc.	Jupiter	Venus	Saturn	Sun	Moon	Mars
4am	Moon	Mars	Merc.	Jupiter	Venus	Saturn	Sun
5am	Saturn	Sun	Moon	Mars	Merc.	Jupiter	Venus

[1] SY 4:1.

[2] SY 4:6.

[3] A planetary sigil may be placed beneath the amulet or talisman for further emphasis of the planetary force.

[4] Using the letter to curse.

[5] E.g. *Pirkey* of Rabbi Eliezer, c. 830 CE; *On Behakhot*, Rashi 1483 CE.

The Twelve Single Letters

> ‘Twelve Elementals:
> Heh, Vav, Zain, Cheth, Teth, Yod, Lamed, Nun, Samekh, Ayin, Tzaddi, Qoph.
> Their foundation is speech, thought, motion, sight, hearing, action, coition, smell, sleep, anger, taste, laughter.’[1]

The Single Letters, or Elemental Letters as they are also known, form the third component of the Hebrew alphabet. They are called Single Letters because there is only a single way of pronouncing them.

The twelve Single Letters also make the twelve edges of the cube formed by the six Double Letters (with the seventh in the centre). For each side the letters are attributed to the top and bottom edges, and the right-hand edge. They also correspond to the other twelvefold symbolisms such as the Tribes of Israel and the twelve permutations of Tetragrammaton, as well as the zodiacal signs and the twelve diagonal paths of the Tree of Life.

> ‘And with them He formed
> Twelve constellations in the Universe
> Twelve months in the Year
> And twelve directors in the Soul, male and female.’[2]

Letter	Edge	Con-cept	Permu-tation	Body	Zodiac	Tribe
Heh	East upper	Speech	YHVH	Right foot	Aries	Judah
Vav	East north	Thought	YHHV	Right kidney	Taurus	Issachar
Zain	East lower	Motion	YVHH	Left foot	Gemini	Zebulon
Cheth	South upper	Sight	HVHY	Right hand	Cancer	Reuben
Teth	South east	Hearing	HVYH	Left kidney	Leo	Simeon
Yod	South lower	Action	HHVY	Left hand	Virgo	Gad
Lamed	West upper	Coition	VHYH	Gall bladder	Libra	Joseph
Nun	West south	Smell	VHHY	Intestine	Scorpio	Levi
Samekh	West lower	Sleep	VYHH	Pancreas	Sagitta-rius	Benjamin
Ayin	North upper	Anger	HYHV	Liver	Capri-corn	Dan
Tzaddi	North west	Taste	HYVH	Stomach	Aquarius	Asher
Qoph	North lower	Laughter	HHYV	Spleen	Pisces	Naphtali

[1] SY 5:1.

[2] SY 5:3.

The Three Father Letters

The three letters which make up the Holy and Unpronounceable Name of God, Tetragrammaton, are also known as the Father Letters. These are Yod, Heh, and Vav. Yod, Heh, and Vav have the foundations of action, speech, and thought. Together these principles make the whole dynamic of human activity – thought directs speech and action. Thus Tetragrammaton can be seen as not only being the ultimate creative word of divinity, but also an expression of human existence.

Significantly these three letters can all serve as suffixes for personal pronouns. Thus when used as a suffix, Yod means 'me', Heh means 'her', and Vav means 'him'.

This fits perfectly with the nature of Tetragrammaton, expressing the female (Heh) and male (Vav), with the divine nature of the word as an expression of the first divine principle (Yod, me).

The three letters are the first three Elemental letters in their letter groups, hence Yod is the first Palatal letter, Heh is the first Guttural letter and Vav is the first Labial letter.

The movement of air, or *Ruach*, with the pronunciation of Tetragrammaton can be seen to move from the palate to the throat, then to the lips, and finally back to the palate. Thus the initial movement is from the palate (Yod) to the throat (Heh). This inward movement recalls the title of Yah (Yod Heh) as the Inner Chamber, giving another meaning to this Divine Name.

From the throat the movement is then outward, to the lips (Vav), expressing the outward manifestation of the *Ruach*, as seen in the sealing of the six directions.[1] This done, the movement is once more inward to the throat, returning to the innermost source (Heh final).

That Yod is the first letter of the Tetragrammaton might seem strange, with the higher numeration of ten attributed to it. However it should be recalled that ten is the sum of the first four numbers (1+2+3+4) and in this sense it represents all these numbers in the style of the Pythagorean

Tetraktys.[2] So as Yod represents the numbers from one to four, so the sequence can be seen to continue with five (Heh) and six (Vav).

It is significant that the three Father Letters are also the only ones which when spelt in full add to twice their numerical value. Thus Heh (5) spelt in full adds to 10 (HH), Vav (6) spelt in full adds to 12 (VV) and Yod (10) spelt in full adds to 20 (YVD).

These three letters are permutated in the *Sepher Yetzirah* to the directions, which equates them to the six Sephiroth of Yetzirah, from Chesed to Yesod. This is why these Sephiroth are known as the Sephiroth of Construction, for with them the dimensions of the universe are created.

> ‘He chose three letters from among the Elementals
> And he set them in His great Name
> And with them, He sealed six extremities.
> He sealed “above” and faced upward
> And sealed it with Yod Heh Vav.
> He sealed “below” and faced downward
> And sealed it with Heh Yod Vav.
> He sealed “east” and faced straight ahead
> And sealed it with Vav Yod Heh.
> He sealed “west” and faced backward
> And sealed it with Vav Heh Yod
> He sealed “south” and faced to the right
> And sealed it with Yod Vav Heh.
> He sealed “north” and faced to the left
> And sealed it with Heh Vav Yod.’[3]

These permutations are attributed to the planetary Sephiroth thus:

Permutation	Direction	Sephira
YHV	Above	Netzach
HYV	Below	Hod
VYH	East	Tiphereth
VHY	West	Yesod
HVY	North	Chesed
YVH	South	Geburah

We may note a number of important magical concepts in this verse, which should be considered further. The first axis is from above to below, recalling the axiom of 'As above, so below'. Thus it is significant that the first permutation is Yod Heh Vav, for this comprises the divine name of Yah, the Inner Chamber, followed by Vav. Vav numbers six, giving the six permutations and directions of the Inner Chamber as it becomes manifest as the Outer Expanse. This is referred to in the Zohar, where it says 'The key is added which containeth six, and closeth its gate.'[4]

That Tiphereth is in the East is also significant, for it is the place of the sunrise. Magically this is the place of beginnings, and God is described as facing East – 'He sealed "east" and faced straight ahead.' From this we can see that when performing Qabalistic rituals, where East is faced, we are duplicating the position of God in creating space. When direction is not specified, East is the default.

The six permutations of Yod Heh Vav are also known as 'six rings', as seen in the *Sepher Yetzirah*. Thus when it says 'A great, mystical secret covered and sealed with six rings',[5] it refers to the formation of the universe through the sealing of the six directions.

Yod, Heh, and Vav also play a significant role in the old text known as *Sepher Ha-Ot* (*The Book of the Letter*) written by Rabbi Abulafia.

'Yod bears witness to the Throne[6] that is the height of Heh, up to the height of the Vav …. And the final Heh is Shekinah's seal, the inspiration offering prophecy and salvation to all souls by her Voice and lightness.'[7]

We may also note that the divine name and word of power IAO has often been used as an abbreviation for Tetragrammaton. This can be seen as a representation of the Father Letters, as Yod Heh and Vav can be transliterated as I, A and O respectively.

Sepher Yetzirah Space Consecration / Temple Opening Ritual

I created this ritual after being inspired by the *Sepher Yetzirah*, specifically verses 1:12-15. It struck me that the phraseology used lent itself perfectly to a Qabalistic opening for anyone who preferred to focus on the Divine Name exclusively, without the use of archangels or other names such as those found in the Lesser Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram. It draws much more on classic older Kabbalistic principles in the use of the text and the visualisations which go with it, such as the cube of space, which is ideal for most modern rooms.

The Ritual

Stand facing East in the centre of your space.

I will now rise from below to above

With the Breath of the Living God

Ruach HaQadosh

(This name should be vibrated, as should all the permutations of Yod Heh Vav)

I seal above with Yod Heh Vav

(Draw the letters from right to left above your head as you vibrate them, at least a foot [30cm] long, and visualise them in blinding white fire)

I seal below with Heh Yod Vav

(Draw the white flaming letters from right to left down towards the floor at hip level)

I seal east with Vav Yod Heh

(Draw the white flaming letters from right to left at shoulder level towards the East)

I seal west with Vav Heh Yod

(Draw the white flaming letters from right to left at shoulder level towards the West)

I seal south with Yod Vav Heh

(Draw the white flaming letters from right to left at shoulder level towards the South)

I seal north with Heh Vav Yod

(Draw the white flaming letters from right to left at shoulder level towards the North)

Their vision is like the appearance of lightning

Their limit has no end

See the permutations move to the walls, floor and ceiling of the room marking its boundaries)

Yod Heh Vav Heh

(See the Divine name is fiery white letters about two foot [60cm] in front of your face as you vibrate it)

All that is formed and all that is spoken

Emanates from one Name

Breath from Spirit

(See the flames on the edges of the fiery letters moving more as if blown by breath)

Fire from Breath

(See the flames grow stronger, having been fed by the breath of life)

Water from Fire

(See the image of the fiery letters become somewhat translucent, as if seen through water)

Earth from Water

(See the fiery letters become more substantial, as if they are now three-dimensional rather than two-dimensional)

Substance out of Chaos

Existence out of Non-existence

I stand on my essence

As the Creator sits on his base

(Draw the fiery letters into your heart and bring hands to prayer position in front of the heart)

There is no corresponding banishing for this ritual. The purpose of it is to strengthen and sanctify the room in which it is performed, and to this end the cumulative power of repetition will strengthen the sanctity of the space. I do however recommend a Statement of Completion at the end of work to act as a demarcation between your magical work and returning to mundane practice. This is a repetition of the end of the opening, derived from the end of SY 1:4, 'Make [each] thing stand on its essence. Make the Creator sit on his base' and by its nature implies the formula of 'As above, so below'.

Statement of Completion

Face east with your arms hanging straight by your side, legs together.

Proclaim:

I stand on my essence (bring hands to prayer position in front of the heart)

As the Creator sits on his base (clasp hands to heart, bring them to the mouth, kiss the fingertips and open your hands out as in a gesture of blessing)

From this statement return to mundane activity.

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[1] SY 1:13.

[2] Also used as an expression of Tetragrammaton to produce the total of seventy-two, thus indicating its expression as the seventy-two divine names of the Shemhamphorash. See *Climbing the Tree of Life*, Rankine, 2005, p65 for more on this.

[3] SY 1:13.

[4] 'The Book of Concealed Mystery', 47, *Zohar*.

[5] SY 3:2.

[6] I.e. Binah as the Greater Shekinah and first Heh of YHVH.

[7] *Sepher Ha-Ot* 5.

The 22 Letters

Aleph

א

‘Why does Aleph stand at the beginning of the alphabet? Because it came before everything, even the Torah.’[1]

Letter	Aleph
Type	Mother, Guttural
Meaning	Ox
English	A, E
Numeration	1
Spelt in Full	ALPh
Numeration in full	111
Attribution	Air
Bodily Attribution	Chest

As the first letter, Aleph has a great deal of power. This may be seen in its shape, for it is made up of two Yod’s and a Vav. The numeration of these component parts is twenty-six (2x10+6), the same total as Tetragrammaton, alluding to the power contained in the first letter as the initial manifestation.

Aleph did not approach God to ask to be the first letter of creation and God asked her why? Aleph replied she had seen the other letters present themselves unsuccessfully, and that as He had already given the gift to Beth it would be improper to take the gift away and give it to her. God was pleased and told her:

‘Aleph, Aleph, although I will begin the creation of the world with Beth, thou wilt remain the first of the letters. My unity shall not be expressed except through thee, on thee shall be based all calculations and operations of the world, and unity shall not be expressed save by the letter Aleph.’[2]

This also is why Aleph is seen as the divine breath and attributed to Air, for it represents the divine power as ‘the Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters.’[3]

Aleph as the number 1 is associated with the first Sephira of Kether. As such it heads the Middle Pillar, and is associated with the whole of this pillar. This is particularly evident in the upper part of the pillar, where the air, which corresponds to *Ruach*, passes through the throat (Daath) into the lungs, where the oxygen passes through into the blood to be pumped around the body by the heart (Tiphereth). Also, Aleph is at the heart of Tiphereth, as the middle letter (ThPhARTh), and is not to be found in the names of any other Sephiroth.

This association with Kether is seen in association with Metatron, archangel of Kether. This is seen in the *Shiur Qoma*,[4] where it says, ‘This is the seat of Metatron, the Lord of the Presence which is written with one-letter [i.e. Aleph, whose numeration is one].’

However, as there is an intimate connection between Kether and Malkuth, it is not surprising to see that Aleph can also be associated with the final Sephira. Malkuth is associated with the mouth as the letter Tav, and the mouth utters the breath (Aleph). When these letters are combined they make the word *Ath*, meaning ‘essence’.

When spelt in full, Aleph is comprised of the letters Aleph Lamed Peh. If *Temurah*[5] is applied to this and the word reversed, it becomes Peh Lamed Aleph, *Peleh*, which means ‘miracle’. Thus Aleph when considered in this context can be seen as the miracle of the beginning of creation, of divine action to bring existence and life into being.

A large Aleph has the value of 1000, and can be seen as representing the first divine presence of Kether (1), from the three Veils of Negativity (Ain, Ain Soph and Ain Soph Aur, represented by 000). This is expressed in the Zohar, where it says, ‘The top point of the Aleph symbolises the hidden supernal thought, in which is contained potentially the extension of the supernal firmament.’[6]

Beth

ב

'He made the letter Beth king over Wisdom.'[7]

Letter	Beth
Type	Double, Labial
Meaning	House
English	B, (V)
Numeration	2
Spelt in Full	BITh
Numeration in full	414
Attribution	Moon
Bodily Attribution	Right Eye

Beth is one of the two letters which is used as a prefix, meaning ('in'); the other being Lamed. Together these letters form the word *Lev* (LB, heart).

Beth is the first letter of *Berakhoth*, meaning 'benedictions' or 'blessings', a concept particularly associated with it. This is part of the reason why Beth is the first letter of Genesis, beginning the *Tanakh* (Old Testament), as discussed in the Zohar Prologue.

In the *Sepher Yetzirah* Beth is associated with the concept of Wisdom and Folly.[8] Wisdom is the foundation of Beth, and its transpose is Folly. In this context the associated Sephira is Chesed, as the direction of South. This recalls the Talmudic saying, 'He who wishes wisdom, let him face south; He who wishes wealth, let him face north.' It is also associated with the Moon, Sunday and the Right Eye.[9]

Beth is also likened to man, which can be seen in the context of the number two representing the duality of male and female. This is discussed in

the Bahir, where it says: ‘Whom does the Beth resemble? Man, who was created with wisdom [Chokmah], for he is closed on all sides and open only in front, whereas the Aleph is open in the back.’[10]

As a Double Letter, Beth can be pronounced in two ways. When it is the first letter of a word, it is the hard pronunciation, as a B, but when it occurs within a word the soft pronunciation is used, i.e. as a V. This is particularly noteworthy for vibration of names such as Gabriel (Ga-Vree-El).

Gimel

ג

‘And why is Gimel the third letter? To announce that he shows love [*gomeleth*].’[11]

Letter	Gimel
Type	Double, Palatal
Meaning	Camel
English	G, (J)
Numeration	3
Spelt in Full	GML
Numeration in full	73
Attribution	Mars
Bodily Attribution	Right Ear

In the *Sepher Yetzirah* Gimel is associated with the concept of Wealth and Poverty.[12] Wealth is the foundation of Gimel, and its transpose is Poverty. In this context the associated Sephira is Geburah, as the direction of North. This recalls the Talmudic saying, ‘He who wishes wisdom, let him face south; He who wishes wealth, let him face north.’

As a Double Letter Gimel may be pronounced in two ways, as a hard G at the beginning of words, or as a soft J in the middle of words. Gimel is made from a Vav and a Yod, giving it a component numeration of 16.

Gimel put forward her claim with Daleth to begin creation, but God said they should not be separated for ‘there will never cease to be some in need on the earth’ (Deuteronomy 15:11) and they would need benevolence, for Daleth signified poverty (*Dalluth*) and Gimel signified beneficence (*Gemul*). Thus the two should maintain each other.

Daleth

ד

'He made the letter Daleth king over Seed.'[13]

Letter	Daleth
Type	Double, Lingual
Meaning	Door
English	D, (Th)
Numeration	4
Spelt in Full	DLTh
Numeration in full	434
Attribution	Sun
Bodily Attribution	Right Nostril

In the *Sepher Yetzirah* Daleth is associated with the concept of Seed and Desolation.[14] Seed is the foundation of Daleth, and its transpose is Desolation. In this context the associated Sephira is Tiphereth, as the direction of East.

Daleth emphasizes the concept of growth, and should be focused on when you are being creative, to help produce the *seed of an idea*. If you are struggling to think of something, try facing East, blocking your left nostril with your left forefinger, and breathe just through the right nostril. Whilst doing this focus again on the idea and inspiration may strike.

The Double Letter Daleth may be pronounced in two ways. The hard preliminary Daleth is pronounced D, the soft Daleth within words may be pronounced as a Th, as in the word 'the'. Daleth is often confused with Resh due to their similar appearance. In fact Daleth is made up of a Resh with a small Yod added, giving it a component numeration of 210.

Daleth and Gimel then put forward their claims together, but God said they should not be separated for ‘there will never cease to be some in need on the earth’ (Deuteronomy 15:11) and they would need benevolence; for Daleth signified poverty (*Dalluth*) and Gimel signified beneficence (*Gemul*). Thus the two should maintain each other.

Heh

ה

'He made the letter Heh king over speech.'[15]

Letter	Heh
Type	Single, Guttural
Meaning	Window
English	H, E
Numeration	5
Spelt in Full	HH
Numeration in full	10
Attribution	Aries
Bodily Attribution	Right Foot

Heh is one of the three Father letters which comprise the unpronounceable name of Tetragrammaton. As one of these letters it can also be used as a suffix, meaning 'her', which is in keeping with its symbolism as the Greater and Lesser Shekinah (first and final Heh) or Mother and Daughter within Tetragrammaton.

In the *Sepher Yetzirah*, Heh is associated with the foundation of speech.[16] Heh as a representation of the feminine divine principle can be used as an abbreviation for Binah, which it represents in Tetragrammaton as the word of Briah. Hence Heh embodies Understanding (Binah), which comes through action. This is why

it has the numeration of five, for the most active part of the body for doing is the hand, which has five fingers.

Heh is also used as an abbreviation for the soul. Heh has the numeration of five, and the soul has five levels, *Nephesh*, *Ruach*, *Neshamah*, *Chayah*

and *Yechidah*.

Part of Soul	**Nature**	**World**	**Classical Model**	**Modern Model**
Yechidah	Ephemeral Divine Essence		Kether	Kether
Chayah	Creative Impulse	Atziluth	Chokmah	Chokmah
Neshamah	Upper Soul	Briah	Binah	Binah
Ruach	Intellectual Spirit	Yetzirah	Chesed – Yesod	Chesed – Tiphereth
Nephesh	Animal Soul	Assiah	Malkuth	Yesod – Netzach
Guph	Body	(exists in Assiah)		Malkuth

The shape of Heh can also be seen as being comprised of the letters Daleth and Vav, adding to 10 (4+6), which is also the total for Heh spelt in full (HH). Thus again the hand is emphasised with Heh, for though it numbers 5, it is comprised of the letters on either side of it, which total 10, the number of fingers on both hands.

Heh can also be made from the letters Nun and Yod.[17] This gives a component total of 60 (50+10), the numeration of Samekh.

Heh did not approach God to be considered for first letter of creation as she was dismissed with Vav as being part of Tetragrammaton.

Vav

ו

‘Whom does the Vav resemble? It resembles him, ‘who is wrapped in light as in a raiment’ [Psalms 104:2], and Vav signifies the six directions [of space].’[18]

Letter	Vav
Type	Single, Labial
Meaning	Nail, Hook
English	V, O, U
Numeration	6
Spelt in Full	VV
Numeration in full	12
Attribution	Taurus
Bodily Attribution	Right Kidney

Vav is one of the three Father letters which comprises the unpronounceable name of Tetragrammaton. As one of these letters it can also be used as a suffix, meaning ‘him’. In the *Sepher Yetzirah*, Vav is associated with the foundation of thought.[19]

Vav approached God and declared herself part of the divine name (Tetragrammaton). God said that both Vav and Heh were part of the divine name and that was sufficient for them, they did not need to start creation.

Zain

ז

‘He made the letter Zain king over motion.’[20]

Letter	Zain
Type	Single, Dental
Meaning	Sword
English	Z
Numeration	7
Spelt in Full	ZIN
Numeration in full	67
Attribution	Gemini
Bodily Attribution	Left Foot

In the *Sepher Yetzirah*, Zain is associated with the foundation of motion.[21]

Zain presented herself to God as an option to start creation and said she represented the observance of the Sabbath, as it was written ‘Remember (*Zakhor*) the Sabbath day, and keep it holy’ (Exodus 20:8). However, God replied she represented war being shaped like a sword or lance.

Cheth

ח

'He made the letter Cheth king over sight.'[22]

Letter	Cheth
Type	Single, Guttural
Meaning	Fence
English	Ch
Numeration	8
Spelt in Full	ChITh
Numeration in full	418
Attribution	Cancer
Bodily Attribution	Right Hand

In the *Sepher Yetzirah*, Cheth is associated with the foundation of sight.[23] Cheth did not approach God to claim the first place in creation alphabet as she was dismissed with Teth as together they made Sin (*Chet*).

Teth

ט

'He made the letter Teth king over hearing.'[24]

Letter	Teth
Type	Single, Lingual
Meaning	Serpent
English	T
Numeration	9
Spelt in Full	TITh
Numeration in full	419
Attribution	Leo
Bodily Attribution	Left Kidney

Teth may be seen as being made of a Vav and a Kaph, totalling twenty-six, and implying the power of Tetragrammaton. This adds an interesting perspective to the serpent symbolisms found in Genesis and Exodus. In the *Sepher Yetzirah*, Teth is associated with the foundation of hearing.[25]

Tet approached God and suggested herself on the basis that she was the first letter of Good (*Tov*). God replied that her goodness was hidden, as it was written 'O how abundant is your goodness that you have laid up for those who fear you' (Psalm 31:19), and it was not goodness for the created world but for the world to come. Also because the goodness was hidden the gates of the Temple sank into the ground, 'Her gates have sunk (*Tabe'u*) into the ground' (Lamentations 2:9); and with Cheth at her side they made Sin (*Chet*).

Yod

י

‘In time, the accents and melodies, reveal the secret of blood which is Yod his Name.’[26]

Letter	Yod
Type	Single, Palatal
Meaning	Hand
English	I, Y, J
Numeration	10
Spelt in Full	YVD
Numeration in full	20
Attribution	Virgo
Bodily Attribution	Left Hand

Yod is one of the three Father letters which comprises the unpronounceable name of Tetragrammaton. As one of these letters it can also be used as a suffix, meaning ‘me’ or ‘my’ when used at the end of a word.

Yod in Tetragrammaton represents Chokmah and the World of Atziluth. Hence Yod embodies Wisdom (Chokmah), which comes to the individual (me), who receives wisdom. This is why it has the numeration of ten, for the individual (1) receives wisdom from the unmanifest (0). This is hinted at in the Zohar, where the relationship of the one and ten as its expansion is explained in an analogy of the formation of the Tree of Life. Hence we see the source (Kether), the wave (Chokmah), the sea (Binah) and the seven tubes (the lower seven Sephiroth).

‘One, is the source of the sea. A current comes forth from it making a revolution which is Yod. The source is one, and the current makes two. Then

is formed the vast basin known as the sea, which is like a channel dug into the earth, and it is filled by the waters issuing from the sea, and this sea is the third thing. This vast basin is divided up into seven channels, resembling that number of long tubes, and the waters go forth from the sea into the seven channels. Together the source, the current, the sea, and the seven channels make the number ten.'

This then also leads to another mystery, for Yod and Heh make the divine name Yah, and are the first two letters of Tetragrammaton. In this sense they are known as the Inner Chamber. They comprise the part of Tetragrammaton which is unmanifest due to being above the abyss, whereas the Vav He symbolises the seven Sephiroth below the abyss, which also correspond to the days of creation.

When Yod approached God and presented herself to be first letter of creation on the grounds that she was first in the divine name (*Tetragrammaton*, IHVH). God said that as such Yod was the channel of His will and could not be removed from His name.

Kaph

כ

‘And when Kaph descended from its throne of glory, two hundred thousand worlds began to shake, the throne trembled, and all the worlds quaked and were about to fall into ruin.’[27]

Letter	Kaph
Type	Double, Palatal
Meaning	Palm (of hand)
English	K, (Kh)
Numeration	20
Spelt in Full	KPh
Numeration in full	100
Attribution	Venus
Bodily Attribution	Left Eye

In the *Sepher Yetzirah* Kaph is associated with the concept of Life and Death.[28] In this context the associated Sephira is Netzach, as the direction of Up. Life is the foundation of Kaph, and its transpose is Death. Also the word ‘Extermination’ (*Kelayah*) begins with Kaph, as referenced in the Zohar Prologue, when Kaph descended two hundred thousand worlds began to shake and the throne trembled and all the worlds were about to fall into ruin. God ordered Kaph back to her place as she stood for Extermination (*Kelayah*).

As a Double Letter, Kaph can be pronounced as a hard or soft letter. At the beginning of a word, it is pronounced as a hard K, but within a word it is pronounced as a soft Kh.

Lamed

ל

‘He made the letter Lamed king over coition.’[29]

Letter	Lamed
Type	Single, Lingual
Meaning	Ox-goad
English	L
Numeration	30
Spelt in Full	LMD
Numeration in full	74
Attribution	Libra
Bodily Attribution	Gall Bladder

Lamed may be seen as being made of a Vav and a Kaph, totalling twenty-six, and implying the power of Tetragrammaton. In the *Sepher Yetzirah*, Lamed is associated with the foundation of coition.[30]

Lamed is one of the two letters which is used as a prefix, meaning ‘to’; the other being Beth. Together these letters form the word *Lev* (heart). It is particularly significant that the last letter of the Torah is Lamed, in the word Israel. With Beth being the first letter, this makes the word *Lev*, and for this reason the Torah is known as the ‘heart of creation’.

Lamed is made from the letters Kaph and Vav, giving it a component numeration of 26. With this, note that AL (or EL), one of the most common divine names, is comprised of two letters which both have component numeration of 26 (i.e. IHVH).

Lamed was dismissed by God from the quest for being first letter of creation with Mem for being part of the word *Melekh* (King), which was God's title, for the world needed a king and for that reason would need Mem, as well as Lamed and Kaph (*Melekh* = MLK).

Mem

מ

‘Mem is the first letter of the word Mayim [water], Mebova’a [spring]. Meqovor [fountain], Ma’ayin [well], Moqvoh [pool or pond].’[31]

Letter	Mem
Type	Mother, Labial
Meaning	Water
English	M
Numeration	40
Spelt in Full	MIM
Numeration in full	90
Attribution	Water
Bodily Attribution	Stomach

Mem is water, and also represents the womb. This is seen in the *Mikvah*, the ritual water pool used for purification, which contains forty Sah’s (units) of water, the numerical value of Mem. Emerging from the *Mikvah* is like emerging from the womb. Also Mem represents the present, which can be seen as the womb of the future.

Mem as Water represents the Pillar of Mercy, also known as the Pillar of Water. The *Sepher Yetzirah* says ‘Mem hums’,[32] and the sound of humming is particularly associated with Chokmah and prophecy. The word for hum is *Damam* (DMM), in which the letter Mem is dominant.

Mem is also taken as representing the whole Tree of Life as Jacob’s Ladder, i.e. the ten Sephiroth expressed in each of the Four Worlds, and thus forty, as Mem is numbered forty.

When Mem approached God she declared that she began the word *Melekh* (King), which was God's title, and He replied the world needed a king and for that reason would need Mem, as well as Lamed and Kaph (*Melekh* = MLK).

Nun

נ

‘He made the letter Nun king over smell.’[33]

Letter	Nun
Type	Single, Lingual
Meaning	Fish
English	N
Numeration	50
Spelt in Full	NVN
Numeration in full	106
Attribution	Scorpio
Bodily Attribution	Intestines

Nun is linked to Binah through its numerical value of fifty and the doctrine of the Fifty Gates. There are seven gates in each of the seven lower Sephiroth (Malkuth-Chesed) with the fiftieth in Binah. Now fifty is ten multiplied by five, which is the combination of the letters Yod (ten) and Heh (five), forming Yah, the first two letters of Tetragrammaton, known as the Inner Chamber. Also we may note that Nun is one of the letters in the heart of Binah (BINH). In the *Sepher Yetzirah*, Nun is associated with the foundation of smell.[34]

When Nun approached God she declared she was the initial letter in ‘Awesome (*Nara*) in splendour’ (Exodus 15:11) and ‘Comely (*Nawa*) is praise for the righteous’ (Psalm 33:1), but God replied that she also represented the falling (*Nephelim*) and it was for her sake Samekh had returned to her place, so Nun should return under her support.

Samekh

ס

‘He made the letter Samekh king over sleep.’[35]

Letter	Samekh
Type	Single, Dental
Meaning	Prop, Support
English	S
Numeration	60
Spelt in Full	SMK
Numeration in full	120
Attribution	Sagittarius
Bodily Attribution	Pancreas

In the *Sepher Yetzirah*, Samekh is associated with the foundation of sleep.[36]

When Samekh approached, God said she represented Upholding (*Semikah*) of the fallen, to which God replied what would be the fate of the fallen without her, so she moved on.

Ayin

ע

'He made the letter Ayin king over anger.'[37]

Letter	Ayin
Type	Single, Guttural
Meaning	Eye, Fountain
English	Aa, O, Ngh
Numeration	70
Spelt in Full	AyIN
Numeration in full	130
Attribution	Capricorn
Bodily Attribution	Liver

Ayin implies vision by its meaning, but also insight and consciousness, indicating the 'fountaining' of realisation from the unconscious mind into the consciousness.

In the *Sepher Yetzirah*, Ayin is associated with the foundation of anger or aggressiveness.[38] Ayin is said to be made from a Vav inside a Nun, which would give a component numeration of 56.

When Ayin approached God to be the first letter of creation, saying she represented Humility (*A'anavah*), she was refused as she also stood for Iniquity (*A'awon*).

Peh

פ

‘He made the letter Peh king over Dominance. ’[39]

Letter	Peh
Type	Double, Labial
Meaning	Mouth
English	P, Ph, (F)
Numeration	80
Spelt in Full	PhH
Numeration in full	85
Attribution	Mercury
Bodily Attribution	Left Ear

In the *Sepher Yetzirah* Peh is associated with the concept of Dominance and Subjugation.[40] In this context the associated Sephira is Hod, as the direction of Down. As a Double Letter, Peh may be pronounced in two ways. The hard way at the beginning of words is P, the soft way within words is F.

When Peh approached God, she stated that she signified Redemption (*Purkana*) and Deliverance (*Pedut*). God replied that Peh was worthy but she also represented Transgression (*Pesha*) and resembled the serpent in a manner symbolic of the guilty man with bent head and extended hand.

Tzaddi

צ

‘O Tzaddi, thou art Tzaddi, and thou signifiest righteousness, but thou must be concealed.’[41]

Letter	Tzaddi
Type	Single, Dental
Meaning	Fish-hook
English	Tz
Numeration	90
Spelt in Full	TzDI
Numeration in full	104
Attribution	Aquarius
Bodily Attribution	Stomach

Tzaddi is shaped out of the letters Yod and Nun[42] giving a component numeration of 60. When Tzaddi approached God she justified herself as the first letter of the Righteous (*Tzadikim*). However God replied that Tzaddi must remain concealed because she consisted of Nun surmounted by Yod, representing the union of male and female. This is discussed as expressing the mystery of Adam in Eden, and his original hermaphroditic nature.

‘For thou consistest of the letter Nun surmounted by the letter Yod. And this is the mystery of the creation of the first man, who was created with two faces (male and female combined). In the same way the Nun and the Yod in the Tzaddi are turned back to back and not face to face.’[43]

Qoph

ק

'He made the letter Qoph king over laughter.'[44]

Letter	Qoph
Type	Single, Palatal
Meaning	Back of head
English	Q
Numeration	100
Spelt in Full	QVPh
Numeration in full	186
Attribution	Pisces
Bodily Attribution	Spleen

Qoph may be seen as being made of a Vav and a Kaph, totalling twenty-six, and implying the power of Tetragrammaton.

In the *Sepher Yetzirah*, Qoph is associated with the foundation of laughter.[45] Qoph may be formed from a Resh and a Yod, giving a component numeration of 210.

In the Zohar Prologue, Qoph is dismissed with Resh during the approach of Shin because she formed part of the group of letters expressing forgery (*Sheqer*, with the letters Shin and Resh). He also observed that Shin was a letter of truth, but Qoph and Resh belong to evil, and attached themselves to her to form a conspiracy (*Qesher*).

Resh

ר

'He made the letter Resh king over Peace.'[46]

Letter	Resh
Type	Double, Dental
Meaning	Head
English	R
Numeration	200
Spelt in Full	RISh
Numeration in full	510
Attribution	Saturn
Bodily Attribution	Left Nostril

In the *Sepher Yetzirah* Resh is associated with the concept of Peace and War.[47] Peace is the foundation of Resh, and its transpose is War. In this context the associated Sephira is Yesod, as the direction of West. Although a Double Letter, the soft form of Resh has been lost, and it is always pronounced as an R sound wherever it is in a word.

Resh does not approach God in the Zohar as she is dismissed during the approach of Shin. As she formed part of the group of letters expressing forgery (*Sheqer*, with the letters Shin and Qoph), and which would not exist without Shin being drawn into their company. He also observed that Shin was a letter of truth, but Qoph and Resh belong to evil, and attached themselves to her to form a conspiracy (*Qesher*).

Shin

ש

'Why does Shin include all the whole world? Because with it one writes an answer [T'shuvah].'[48]

Letter	Shin
Type	Mother, Dental
Meaning	Tooth
English	Sh
Numeration	300
Spelt in Full	ShIN
Numeration in full	360
Attribution	Fire
Bodily Attribution	Head

Shin as fire represents the Pillar of Severity, which is also known as the Pillar of Fire. The *Sepher Yetzirah* says 'Shin hisses',[49] and this sound is associated with Binah, in contrast to the hum of Chokmah.

Shin is also known as the root of the Tree, as it is the beginning and end of the word *Shoresh* (ShRSh), meaning 'root'. Shin was the second letter to approach God for the right to start creation, giving the reason that she was the initial letter of *Shaddai* (Almighty). God replied that Shin was worthy, but that she formed part of the group of letters expressing forgery (*Sheqer*, with the letters Qoph and Resh), and which would not exist without Shin being drawn into their company. He also observed that Shin was a letter of truth, but Qoph and Resh belong to evil, and attached themselves to her to form a conspiracy (*Qesher*).

Tav

ת

'Yahveh took the Tav sign from the sparks of his fire.'[50]

Letter	Tav
Type	Double, Lingual
Meaning	Cross
English	Th, (T)
Numeration	400
Spelt in Full	ThV
Numeration in full	406
Attribution	Jupiter
Bodily Attribution	Mouth

In the *Sepher Yetzirah* Tav is associated with the concept of Grace and Ugliness.[51] Grace is the foundation of Tav, and its transpose is Ugliness. In this context the associated Sephira is Malkuth, as the centre. It is also associated with Jupiter, Saturday and the mouth.[52]

Of all the letters, Tav probably has more variations in pronunciation than any other. It can be pronounced as a T in both hard and soft form (Sefardic Jewish form) or it is sometimes pronounced as an S when it is soft and contained in a word (Ashkenazic Jewish form). This is the form in which Israel Regardie wrote, using the Ashkenazic form and writing Malkus rather than Malkuth, for example. The hard T is pronounced on the end of words, which is particularly noteworthy for the Sephirotic names, like TifereT, MalkuT, DaaT. Tav is made from a Daleth and a Nun, giving it a component numeration of 54.

The Zohar Prologue tells how the Hebrew letters all approached God to be the one that begins creation, starting with Tav, who asked on the grounds that she was the final letter of Truth (*Ameth*), which is engraved upon His seal. God replied that Tav was worthy, but that Tav was destined to be the mark on the heads of the worthy (Ezekiel 9.4) and was also the final letter of Death (*Maweth*).

Meditation on the 22 Letters to Strengthen the Subtle Body

Meditation on the letters visualised at the appropriate part of the body has long been used as a technique for strengthening the subtle (or energy) body. To do this, vibrate the letter for a period of time (at least five minutes) whilst visualising it in brilliant flaming white at the point of the body, and end by drawing the flaming letter into the body part and vibrating the Tetragrammaton (IHVH) and Shekinah (Sh-key-nah). The Shekinah as the upper soul is connected to the subtle body, and this also emphasizes the creative duality of this divine pair.

This should be done for each letter individually, one a day. When all the letters have been meditated upon in this fashion, you can perform the entire sequence of the alphabet in one meditation session to further strengthen the subtle body. The cycle of 23 days may then be repeated.

Letter	Vibration	Body Area
Aleph	Alef	Chest
Beth	Bet	Right Eye
Gimel	Gimel	Right Ear
Daleth	Dalet	Right Nostril
Heh	Hay	Right Foot
Vav	Vav	Right Kidney
Zain	Zane	Left Foot
Cheth	Chet	Right Hand
Teth	Tet	Left Kidney
Yod	Yod	Left Hand
Kaph	Kaf	Left Eye
Lamed	Lamed	Gall Bladder
Mem	Mim	Belly
Nun	Nun	Intestines
Samekh	Samek	Pancreas
Ayin	Iyin	Liver
Peh	Pay	Left Ear
Tzaddi	Zaddi	Stomach
Qoph	Kough	Spleen
Resh	Rish	Left Nostril
Shin	Shin	Head
Tav	Tav	Mouth

[1] *Bahir* 13.

[2] Zohar Prologue 3a. The story from the prologue to the Zohar illustrates the feminine nature of the Hebrew alphabet, whilst also explaining why the letters are in the sequence they are. Additionally many of the words used as examples are ones found in Kabbalistic texts and the Old Testament. This is why I have included it in this section on the letters for more context.

[3] Genesis 1:2.

[4] *The Measure of the Divine Body*.

[5] *Temurah* is the name for reversal of a word to form another word, which obviously bears the same numeration, to explore the connections which unfold.

[6] *Zohar* 1.21a.

[7] SY 4:8

[8] SY 4:2-3.

[9] SY 4:8.

[10] *Bahir* 11a.

[11] *Bahir* 13.

[12] SY 4:2-3.

[13] SY 4:10.

[14] SY 4:2-3.

[15] SY 5:7.

[16] SY 5:1.

[17] *Bahir* 42.

[18] *Bahir* 55.

[19] SY 5:1.

[20] SY 5:7.

[21] SY 5:1.

[22] SY 5:8.

[23] SY 5:1.

[24] SY 5:8.

[25] SY 5:1.

[26] *Sepher Ha-Ot* 4.

[27] *Zohar* Prologue 3a.

[28] SY 4:2-3.

[29] SY 5:9.

[30] SY 5:1.

[31] 'Regarding the Power of Ruach', *Sepher Rezial Hemelach.*

[32] SY 2:1.

[33] SY 5:9.

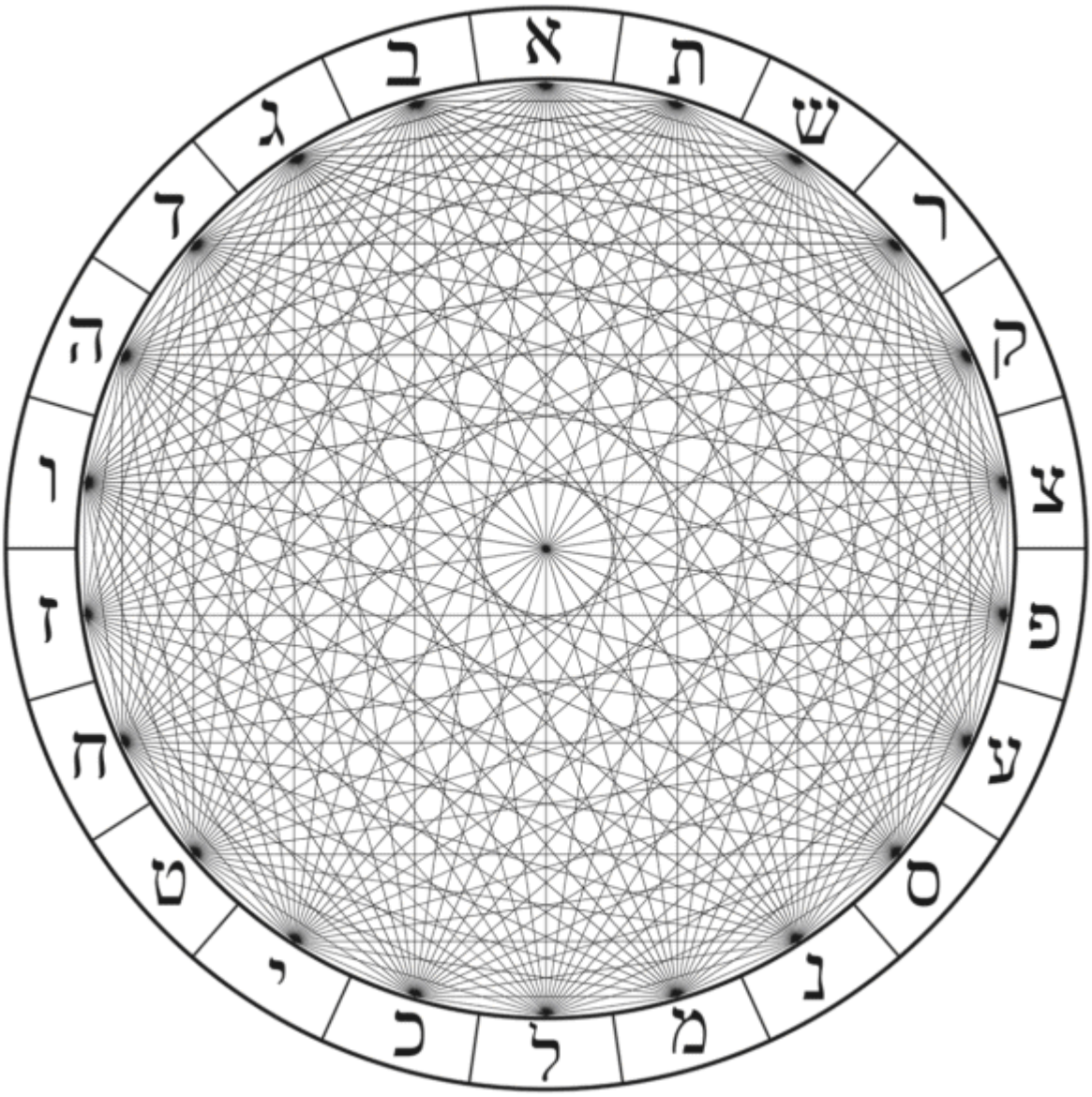
[34] SY 5:1.

[35] SY 5:9.

[36] SY 5:1.

[37] SY 5:10.
[38] SY 5:1.
[39] SY 4:12.
[40] SY 4:2-3.
[41] *Zohar* Prologue 2b.
[42] *Bahir* 42, *Zohar* Prologue 2b.
[43] *Zohar* Prologue 2b.
[44] SY 5:10.
[45] SY 5:1.
[46] SY 4:13.
[47] SY 4:2-3.
[48] *Bahir* 26.
[49] SY 2:1.
[50] *Sepher Ha-Ot* (*The Book of the Letter*) 1.
[51] SY 4:2-3.
[52] SY 4:14.

The 231 Gates



If you place the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet around a circle, and join each letter to every other letter, you get 231 lines (Σ1-21). A complex meditative technique for creative visualisation based on the *Sepher Yetzirah* makes use of this.

> ‘Twenty-two Foundation Letters:
> He placed them in a circle

Like a wall with 231 Gates.
The Circle oscillates back and forth.
A sign for this is:
There is nothing in good higher than Delight
There is nothing evil lower than Plague.
How?
He permuted them, weighed them, and transformed them,
Aleph with them all and all of them with Aleph
Beth with them all and all of them with Beth.
They repeat in a cycle and exist in 231 Gates.'[1]

Invoking with the 231 Gates

Sit down facing east, and see yourself in a black circle, surrounded by blackness. Then in turn visualise the letters rising from the ground at the circumference of the circle. See each letter rise in turn and stand at the circumference of the circle, flaming gold. Aleph should be facing you in the East, with the letters running clockwise around the circle all the way to Tav. Thus, if you look to the east, you see Aleph with Tav on its left, making the word ATh, meaning 'Essence'.

When all the letters are visibly surrounding you, see a golden thread of light join from Aleph to Beth, and vibrate the combination of letters AB. Then do the same for Aleph and Gimel, seeing the gold thread and vibrating AG. Do this for Aleph with every letter, forming 21 threads of gold from Aleph to around the circle. The same procedure should then be repeated for Beth, beginning with Beth to Aleph (BA), and then Beth Gimel (BG), all the way to Beth Tav (BTh).

At the end of this process you sit in a golden web of 231 strands, representing the permutations of letters that form creation. From here you can visualise your desired intent, and set it in the centre of the circle, amidst all the threads, powered by the energy you have raised through your visualisation and chanting. This is what is meant by 'There is nothing in good higher than Delight'. See the energy gathering in the centre, and then shoot the intent upwards into the blackness to realisation.

Banishing with the 231 Gates

If you need to get rid of something, you can apply the same technique, but in reverse. Then you are working with the principle that 'There is nothing evil lower than Plague', where you banish an undesired influence. Thus the delight (*Oneg*, ONG) achieved through positive action is reversed by switching the sequence, producing plague (*Nega*, NGO).

To begin, you once again see yourself sitting in a black circle, surrounded by blackness. This time though, see the golden fiery letters rising from the ground at the circumference starting with Tav, just to the left of East, and work anticlockwise around the circle, all the way back to Aleph in the East.

When you have done this, again create the golden threads, but start with the last combination, i.e. Tav Shin (ThSh) and chant this as you see the golden thread form, then Tav Resh (ThR), all the way to Tav Aleph (ThA). Then do the same for Shin, working anticlockwise around the circle, starting with Shin Tav (ShT), then Shin Resh (ShR) and all the way back to Aleph. Repeat this for each letter until you have finished with Aleph Beth (AB).

Then visualise the thing you wish to banish in the centre of the web of golden threads, and see it sinking into the blackness, to be absorbed by the universe and taken away from you.

The 231 Gates as a Group Rite

This ritual can be done with a group, with 11 or 22 practitioners. Instead of seeing yourself in the centre, form a circle. Starting in the East, the first person (if 11) should draw the Hebrew letters for Aleph on their right palm and Beth on their left palm, the second person Gimel on the left and Daleth on the right, all the way to the eleventh person having Shin on their right and Tav. Each person should have their arms outstretched forward, with their palms facing into the centre of the circle. This makes it a lot easier for everyone to visualize the threads of golden energy connecting all the letters. Build up the web of gates moving through the sequence of combinations, with everyone vibrating the letter combinations. The additional vocal power significantly increases the power of the ritual – I would recommend an agreed intent for the rite, so that all are united in focusing on the same goal. If a visualization of the intent is used, this should be agreed before beginning for harmony throughout. The same principle can be applied with 22 people, except each person has one letter on the palm of their preferred hand, going clockwise from Aleph in the East.

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[1] SY 2:4-5.

Prayer

Prayer is a very powerful positive spiritual tool which takes one of two forms: it is either an entreaty or request for divine aid, or a giving of thanks to the divine. The former of these is effectively the same as a hymn (as they were viewed in the ancient world), which was generally a request for divine blessing. Effective prayer requires focus and passion. Whilst we are not usually given detailed instructions as children on how to pray beyond closing our eyes, clasping hands and thinking of God, the Torah and Kabbalists of the past have left between them a range of useful tips and instructions for effective prayer.

Prayers often served to educate those who heard the prayers when spoken by members of the priesthood, containing descriptions both of the deities, their titles and of their attributes and deeds. Prayers would also often demonstrate how the deity addressed by the petitioner was superior in their way, and most favoured of the heavenly company. This formula is seen again and again throughout the texts and buildings of the ancient world, from the cuneiform tablets of ancient Babylon and the hieroglyphic inscriptions of ancient Egypt to the written hymns of ancient Greece.

Prayer in Qabalah

Prayer ascends from below to above, and the resulting blessing descends from above to below, echoing the hermetic formula of 'As above, so below', and the two directions up and down the Qabalistic Tree of Life. This then indicates the role of the person praying as the vessel for the results of the prayer to act through. The practice of praying Kabbalistically was described by Rabbi Joseph Gikatallia (1248-1305) in his classic work *The Gates of Light*:

'When a person prays, he must concentrate and ascend from Sefira to Sefira, from desire to desire. He must continue in this manner until in his heart he reaches the Source of the Highest Will, which is called the Infinite [Ain Soph].'[1]

Consideration of the Psalms makes the intensity required for prayer plainly obvious, e.g. 'With my whole heart I seek you.'[2]

Prayer was perceived as a form of meditation, which is significant as it emphasises the need for stilling the mind and concentrating fully on the prayer. This is beautifully illustrated in a thirteenth century piece by Rabbi Jacob ben Asher (1269-1343):

'It is taught that when one prays, he must concentrate his heart … This means that one must concentrate fully on the words that are expressed with his lips. One must have in mind that the Divine Presence is before him, as it is written. 'I have placed God before me at all times.' [Psalm 16:8] One must arouse his concentration and banish all disturbing thoughts, so that his thoughts and intentions in prayer should be pure.'[3]

Rabbi Abraham Abulafia, who was the first of the line of great Kabbalists expounding in writing upon the mysteries of Kabbalah, has left few surviving documents, but in one of these, *Sepher Chaije Olam Ha-Ba*, he outlines the procedure for prayer, giving an ideal framework. We can see that even here the importance of the Shekinah is emphasised, as the receiver of the prayer.

'Prepare thyself to direct thy heart to God alone! Purify the body and retire to a lonely place … Thou canst carry out thy purpose in thy chamber during the day, but it is better to do so at night. Withhold all thy thoughts from the vanities of the world, for thou art to speak to thy Maker and crave, verily, that He will reveal to thee His power. Wrap thy prayer shawl [*tallith*] around thee! Bind thy phylacteries [*tephillin*] to head and hand, that thou mayest approach with reverence the Shekinah, with which thou must converse. Clean thy clothing, attiring thyself if possible only in white garments. If it is night, do thou kindle many lights … Unite thy thoughts with the Divine Names and with the Angels of God, whom thou mayest think of as surrounding thee in human form.'[4]

All of this makes good sense, and can be summarized as:

- Prayer is better conducted at night
- Pray by yourself in a room set aside for the purpose (i.e. a sacred or temple space)
- Bathe first and wear clean white garments

- Have many candles burning in your space
- Begin with meditation

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[1] *Shaarey Orah* (*The Gates of Light*), Rabbi Joseph Gikatalia.

[2] Psalm 119:10.

[3] *Tur*, Rabbi Jacob ben Asher.

[4] *Sepher Chaije Olam Ha-ba* (*Book of Life of the World to Come*), Abraham Abulafia.

PURIFICATION

‘Many of the Hekhalot, Sefer ha-Razim, and Greco-Egyptian adjurations require purification as part of the ritual, including abstention from certain foods (meat, fish, wine), a daytime fast for a certain number of days (three, seven, or forty), ritual immersions in water, and, in some cases, abstention from sexual activity. These practices are part of a common cultural framework of adjuration that both the Jewish and the Greco-Egyptian adjurations share.’[1]

Religious purification was seen as a vital process across the ancient world. This is something which is still seen today in both mainstream religions and indigenous practices, and could be described as part of the ritual mindset.

The process of purification is a holistic one which spans the different areas of your life, from physical to mental to spiritual. By observing particular strictures or taboos which act to purify your body, you consciously prepare yourself mentally and spiritually. This process may be reinforced with prayer and meditation. Purification is a declaration of intent to be in the best state possible to perform a ritual act. It creates a demarcation between your mundane life and the spiritual act you are preparing for by purifying yourself.

In Qabalah the three most common forms of purification are bathing, fasting or dietary strictures, and regular meditation or prayer as part of the preparation. We have already discussed meditations and prayer previously, so we will focus here on ritual bathing and fasting.

Ritual Baths

The importance of water in the Qabalah is hinted at from the first verses of Genesis where we read, 'God made the sky, and it separated the water below the sky from the water above the sky. And it was so. God named the sky heaven [*shamayim*].'[2] Significantly we see that the word for heaven found in this verse, *shamayim*, also contains the word for water (*mayim*). Qabalistically, water is seen as a medium of the divine, which is seen in the magical significance attached to dew (associated with Kether), rivers and other flowing waters. By descending from above (*above the sky*), through rain and dew, and returning to the heavens through evaporation (from *below the sky*), water embodies the principle of *As above, so below.*

Pure water which has fallen as rain or is from a natural source like a spring, and has not been drawn from its source by an artificial conduit or a human hand, is known as *Living Water*. Thus you can see that living water may be found in lakes, ponds, rivers and springs. Renaissance grimoires and magical texts like the *Key of Solomon* instructed the practitioner specifically to bathe in a river or similar source of living water as part of the purificatory preparation for dealing with angels and other spiritual creatures or performing ritual acts. Living water is also used for purifying ritual items, including amulets and talismans.

The saying that *cleanliness is next to godliness* is absolutely relevant when it comes to the practices you are performing. From this perspective, even if you do not have access to a source of living water (which most people, especially in towns and cities will not), you can bathe or shower regularly (preferably daily) to maintain your physical cleanliness.

Appropriate essential oils or herbs which are suitable for any work you may be performing with a particular Sephira can be added to your bath, and likewise you can meditate on purity and cleanliness when you are in the bath.

Fasting & Diet

Fasting is a good way to cleanse your body from the inside out. Fasting helps your body remove toxins, and also means that your energy does not go into digestion, but into the intent of your rite. When you fast there are two important factors to consider, which are the duration of the fast and the level of fasting.

Unless you are used to fasting and have the free time available, it is generally most practical to fast for a period of 24 hours. You can fast for longer periods, but if you lead a busy and active life this may be impractical, particularly if it is a complete fast with nothing consumed but water.

A normal fast involves abstaining from all food and stimulants. This means that you only drink water, and alcohol and caffeine are cut out. Likewise tobacco as a stimulant should not be used during a fast. If 24 hours of just water is going to be a problem, you could try drinking apple juice to ensure that your blood sugar does not become too low or your energy become drained. Apples are symbolic of the Sephiroth so this is an appropriate substitution to make for practicality. The last thing you want is for the fast to detract from the intent of the rite.

Some people find their metabolism struggles to cope with even relatively short periods of fasting, and it is important that you use the form of fasting best for your body. In such circumstances you might consider eating some fruit to keep you going, but only what is necessary, and none for at least four hours before any ceremony, to ensure your body is not digesting. If you have any health problems you should be sure to consult your doctor before attempting any period of fasting, especially if you plan on doing it for longer than 24 hours.

For most simple rituals it is unnecessary to fast for long periods of time, unless there is a particular reason that your ritual requires it. It is still a good idea to abstain from food and stimulants for at least 4 hours before a ritual, as this will aid any psychic work without you being slowed down by a meal.

Irrespective of fasting, if you are practicing Qabalah there are certain foods you may choose to omit from your diet to assist in your progress. There are foodstuffs that Qabalists chose not to eat due to traditional reasons, such as pork and seafood, and and bread was normally unleavened. There is no firm evidence for a vegetarian diet being associated with the Qabalah, though abstaining from eating animal products does tend to help increase psychic sensitivity.

There are many references in the Old Testament to eating meat, though it has been observed that Ezekiel 4:14 could be seen as suggesting a vegetarian diet is preferable:

'Ah Lord God! I have never defiled myself; from my youth up until now I have never eaten what died of itself or was torn by animals, nor has carrion flesh come into my mouth.'[3]

Your choice of diet is a matter for you to decide; what is important is that it is balanced and healthy.

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[1] *Speaking With Angels*, Lesses, 1996:57.

[2] Genesis 1:8.

[3] Ezekiel 4:14.

Fragrance

As the sense which accesses the deeper brain and unconscious, smell is tremendously powerful. The art of perfumery is based on influencing others by creating an attractive emanation of fragrance which encourages a positive reaction in the olfactory recipients. The same principle may be seen in the use of incense throughout history towards gods and spirits.

Whilst the *Sepher Yetzirah* does not mention incense, the recorded examples of incense being burned as offerings to the Divine go back many thousands of years. Its role in religious ritual and history is interwoven and the sweet-smelling smoke it produced over the millennia can still be found lingering in ancient literature, temples and religious icons. Its ability to evoke emotion and awaken memories makes fragrance one of the most potent tools of religious ritual and practice, and it has been used in traditions from around the world for exactly this purpose, and also as offerings to the gods. In order to understand its place within Qabalistic work, it is necessary to explore some of the key concepts surrounding incense and its use in religious and magical ceremonies first.

> ‘An offering I bring to the mountaintop:
> Incense-burning vessels, seven times seven in number,
> I place on the ground,
> And into them I place sweet grass, cedar wood and myrrh.
> The gods have smelled the fragrance,
> The gods smelled the pleasing fragrance,
> The gods, like flies, came and surrounded the offering.’[1]

This example from more than four thousand years ago shows how incense was being used by the Babylonians as an offering to their gods. The offering of incense in high places would continue through the centuries and was part of the worship of the goddess Asherah (precursor to the Shekinah) by the Canaanite tribes, as is seen from archaeological evidence and in critical references in the Old Testament:

‘Solomon loved the Lord (Yahweh), walking in the statutes of his father David; only, he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places.’[2]

The Babylonians were not isolated in their use of incense. In fact, some of the ancient philosophers, such as the Greek Neo-Platonist Porphyry (234-305 CE), believed that incense, rather than animal flesh, was the preferred burnt offering of the ‘Golden Age’ which had gone before, a time when everyone lived in harmony and perfection with one another. In his work *On Abstinence* he wrote:

‘Crowning and adorning the statues of Hermes and Hecate, and the other sacred images which were left to us by our ancestors, and that he also honoured the Gods with frankincense and sacred wafers and cakes.’[3]

The demand for rare ingredients, such as resins and fragrant herbs, was a major factor in trade in the ancient world. Ingredients like frankincense and myrrh were so popular they were ascribed divine origins in ancient Egypt, said to be the tears of the gods. Various recipes survive today from the ancient world, none probably as famous as Kyphi, the famous Egyptian incense which was also used for its medicinal properties. From Plutarch we learn that incense was burnt in the Egyptian temples three times a day – sunrise, midday and sunset, with frankincense burned at sunrise, myrrh at midday and Kyphi at sunset to honour the journey of the sun god Ra through the day and night. This ritualistic use of incense was common throughout the ancient world and continues on in many religions today.

We can and do continue to use incense for a wide variety of purposes today. It can be used for the obvious perfuming of a space to make it more pleasant for those present, as an offering to the gods and as a means of divination. Divination with incense, which is sometimes known as *libanomancy* (from the Greek word *libanos*, meaning *incense*), is performed by observing the patterns made by the rising smoke as the incense is burnt. Incense can also be used to induce altered states of consciousness in the participants present at a ceremony: as they inhale the smoke, it will affect them both on a physical and emotional level. Incense can also be used for dream incubation, healing, disinfecting and purification of a space and for its symbolic resonance, induced through a system of correspondences. Incense can be used to mark specific events or times, seasons and celebrations. Its use can be subtle, like that of ambient background music, setting a particular mood, or it can be used in a more blatant way, filling a

room with its smoke. Though at times the true purpose behind the burning of incense seems to have been obscured with the passing of years, today incense continues to play a very important role in many of the world's spiritual traditions, a testimony to its effectiveness through its longevity.

The use of fragrance extends beyond just that of incense however, and includes the use of perfumes and anointing oils, which also use the power of scent and the qualities inherent in the natural ingredients from which they are made. And it is fragrance as a whole which interests us from the perspective of exploring the mysteries of the Shekinah, as it is an important tool through which we can stimulate and sustain the intangible divine spark found in the religions of the ancient world, through into the modern day. Proverbs 27:9 tells us that 'Incense and perfume rejoice the heart' which has become a popular purpose for the use of essential oils in the practice of modern aromatherapy, a popular branch of alternative therapies offered today.

The sense of smell has a great significance in relation to life itself, as it is directly linked with the very act of breathing! In Genesis 2:7 the nose is given as the entry point of the soul into man, for God 'breathed into his nostrils a breath of life'. This connection between the nose, which is the organ of smell, with the soul, emphasises the connection between smell and spirituality. The early Kabbalists recognised this, and both incense and anointing oils played a role in ceremonies, and it was important that the right blends were used to ensure that the correct results were achieved. In the Old Testament recipes for ritual use were preserved for this reason, ensuring that future generations would be able to use the exact same tried and tested formula, to create the same effects on the psyche as it did for their ancestors. There are further hints suggesting that each of the ten Sephiroth should have a specific fragrance associated with it found in the Talmud (Shabbat 88b), for each of the commandments is associated with one of the Sephiroth:

'As each commandment was spoken by the Holy One, blessed be He, the world filled with fragrance.'[4]

It is not just through the use of incense that the link between the divine and fragrance is made. In the writings of the early Christian mystics the connection between perfume and heavenly paradise as a beautiful garden (i.e. Eden) is often emphasised. For example, Saint Methodius recorded in

his heavenly vision that, ‘The ever-blossoming meadows, too, were dotted with all kinds of sweet-scented flowers, and from them there was wafted a gentle breeze laden with perfume.’[5]

Passages in the Zohar emphasise the connection between fragrances and the soul, in that the former provide sustenance for the latter. The Zohar recorded this clearly:

‘Rabbi Yose came upon them and said: “Surely the Shekinah is here! I can see from the rose in Rabbi Abba’s hand that one can learn great wisdom from this” ... Rabbi Abba smelled that rose and said: “Surely the world is only sustained through fragrant smells ... For I have come to understand that the soul is only sustained through smell.”’

References to the use of incense extend into the apocryphal books, and in 1 Enoch 29.32 there are references to a number of ingredients, of trees bearing aloes, cinnamon, frankincense, galbanum, mastic, myrrh, pepper, spikenard (nard) and storax. The trees are likened to almond trees, which is an analogy to the Middle Pillar, and the Shekinah.

Kabbalists believed that celebrating the Sabbath brought the parts of the soul together, and that fragrances sustained them when they were again separated during the rest of the week. The use of fragrance can thus be seen as an essential part of the process of integration of the different parts of the soul, to make the seeker more whole.

Incense & Historical Recipes

Incense by its nature helps shift the perceptions of those who smell it, giving it a magical quality which makes it such a useful adjunct to religious ceremonies and magical rites. The evocative influence of the fragrance of burning incense immediately lets people know they are partaking in a spiritual event, and helps shift their mindset accordingly.

The spiritual use of fragrance is very much alive and part of today's religious and spiritual landscape. Banning incense does not work, as Christianity found out in its early days, when after an absence of two centuries for being 'too pagan' it was reintroduced into ceremonies. With a return to the wider use of fragrance, which has never really gone away, we find it has also returned more into the home.

Although incense burning is generally for spiritual purposes, it can also be beneficial for mundane ones too – from banishing unwanted smells, to promoting creativity or helping overcome insomnia. Fragrances can also be used to help encourage dreams, or for healing. As a background to contemplation, meditation or prayer is one of the places where incense really comes into its own as an inspiring tool. In Qabalistic terms, the burning of incense can be seen as an ascent of the tree of Life, taking the scent from the physical to the subtle, from visible to invisible, carrying prayer and intent on the sweet fragrance to the heavens. In the Old Testament, the Book of Exodus is the one which contains the most recipes, which are easy to create for use today in your practices.

The traditional recipe for the Holy Incense was made to a quantity of 365 *maneh* (a *maneh* equals 5lb or 2.27kg), so a *maneh* could be burned each day of the year in the Temple. This involves a quantity of ingredients totalling 1825lb (828.55kg), which is heading towards a ton! Obviously if you wanted to make the authentic recipe you could scale down the quantities, replacing the unit of a *maneh* with a gram, for example, which would still yield nearly 2kg of incense.

1. Holy Incense

‘Take fragrances such as balsam [or storax], onycha, galbanum; and pure frankincense; all of the same weight, as well as (other specified) fragrances. Make [the mixture] into incense, as compounded by a master perfumer, well-blended (or salted), pure and holy.’

This recipe from Exodus 30:34-35 is used for consecration and sanctification. The word for balsam can also be translated as storax and both were available at the time, so it is up to you to decide which you wish to use. Balsam has become a rare ingredient and so storax is probably more practical. The recipe is quite specific, but does have one difficulty, which is that it includes onycha. Onycha is made from ground-up molluscs and this may cause problems from an ethical point of view (if vegetarian or vegan) or practical point of view for supply. The word which onycha is translated from is *shechelet*, meaning *nail/claw*. However this term was also sometimes applied to cloves, so this could be used as a substitute, making the incense both fragrant and practical.

The traditional recipe of eleven ingredients includes all the ingredients found in the sevenfold incense from Jubilees.

Recipe:

- 70 maneh storax/balsam
- 70 maneh clove/onycha
- 70 maneh galbanum
- 70 maneh frankincense
- 16 maneh myrrh
- 16 maneh cassia
- 16 maneh spikenard
- 16 maneh saffron
- 12 maneh costus
- 9 maneh cinnamon
- 3 maneh cinnamon bark
- ¼ kav (1 cup) Sodom salt

2. Sevenfold Incense

‘And in the morning and evening he offered incense, frankincense and galbanum and storax and spikenard and myrrh and spices [poss. Cinnamon]

and costum (?). All seven of these he offered, crushed, mixed in equal parts and pure.'

This recipe in Jubilees 16:21-31 is tied in to the sevenfold symbolism within Qabalah. It can thus be associated with the seven days of the week, the seven planets, etc. This incense can be used for ascending the Tree of Life through the Sephiroth, and so is good for prayer, as indicated by the fact it was offered in the morning and evening, two of the traditional times for prayer.

Cinnamon bark was frequently used in incense recipes, so I suggest this as the most likely ingredient where the phrase *spices* is used. *Costum* is a word said to be of unknown meaning. However a reference in the *Greek Magical Papyri* (PGM XIII.19) shows that costus (*Sassurea lappa*) was used in incense by the Hellenic Greeks and we suggest this is the same substance. Costus root is narcotic and was exported from India to other parts of the ancient world.

The other substances regularly used in making incense were aloe, balsam and cassia. Balsam resin is extremely difficult to obtain, and cassia has a strong similarity to cinnamon, so I suggest aloe as the seventh ingredient in place of costus. Whilst narcotic ingredients may have been used in the ancient world, today we prefer to avoid them and achieve altered states of consciousness through our own actions.

Recipe:

- 1 part frankincense
- 1 part galbanum
- 1 part storax
- 1 part spikenard root
- 1 part myrrh
- 1 part cinnamon bark
- 1 part aloe

3. Song of Solomon Incense

'Spikenard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices.'

This verse, *Song of Solomon* 4:14, lists seven exotic incense ingredients, appropriate to a voluptuous love incense, and to meditation on the Shekinah as the source of souls. The love expressed in the *Song of Solomon* is on a number of levels, and this incense can likewise be used for devotion to the divine or human passion. The seven ingredients correspond to the seven planets, and the seven days of creation, showing this incense also embodies the concept of completion. This hence provides individual ingredients which can be used with the seven double letters when working with them.

Recipe:

- 1 part spikenard root (Venus)
- 1 part saffron (Jupiter)
- 1 part calamus root (Mars)
- 1 part cinnamon bark (Mercury)
- 1 part frankincense (Sun)
- 1 part myrrh (Moon)
- 1 part aloe (Saturn)

Oils

Essential oils have been used nearly as long as incense. The whole perfume industry takes its name from the original use of oils – *per fumum*, meaning *by smoke.* Although the process of effective distillation was only invented in the eleventh century CE by the Persian physician Avicenna (980-1037 CE), weaker water-distilled essences were used by perfumers in the ancient world.

Anointing oils were used as part of the process of preparation for ceremonies, both for the participants and for paraphernalia. The description in Exodus for the holy anointing oil gives us a clear idea of the scope of such use, with instructions to use it for anointing:

'...the Communion Tent, the Ark of Testimony, the table and all its utensils the menorah and its utensils, the incense altar, the sacrificial altar and all its utensils, the washstand and its base. You will thus sanctify them ... You must also anoint Aaron and his sons, sanctifying them as priests to Me.'[6]

1. Holy Anointing Oil

'You must take the finest fragrances, five hundred shekels of distilled myrrh, two half portions, each consisting of two hundred and fifty shekels of fragrant cinnamon and two hundred and fifty shekels of sweet calamus, and five hundred shekels of cassia, all measured by the sanctuary standard, along with a hin of olive oil. Make it into sacred anointing oil. It shall be a blended compound, as made by a skilled perfumer, made especially for the sacred anointing oil.'

The recipe for anointing oil is given in Exodus 30:22-25, as well as instructions for anointing all the objects in the temple with it, including the participants. The reference to a blended compound indicates that the essential oils were extracted from the resins and herbs. This needed a substantial period of time for infusion. This was done by placing the ingredients in pure water for a period of time and then placing the infused

water in with the olive oil and slowly heating it so the water evaporated and left the fragrance in the oil.

Note there are approximately 20 *shekels* to a pound (44 to a kilogram) and a *hin* is approximately 0.97 gallon (3.6 litres).

Recipe:

- 500 shekels myrrh
- 250 shekels cinnamon
- 250 shekels sweet calamus
- 500 shekels cassia
- 1 hin olive oil

2. Oil of Gladness

'...you love righteousness and hate wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions; your robes are all fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia.'

In Psalms 45:8-9 is a reference to an 'oil of gladness', which although in one sense is metaphorical, can also by implication be taken as an actual oil to be worn outside of ceremony, and used on clothes. Certainly King David was said to perfume his clothes and this was said to be very popular with women.

Modern Use

Today the ingredients used in making incense are generally far more easily available and comparatively cheaper than they were in the ancient world. Oils can be made far more easily using essential oils rather than having to rely on a perfumer to distil them for you from large quantities of resins or herbs. Where large quantities are used, they can be scaled down, e.g. reduce 10 *shekels* to 1 gram.

Rose Oil Consecration - The Camp of the Holy Shekinah

The Book of 3 Enoch and others make reference to the camp of the Shekinah, with the four camps around it which are ruled by the four archangels, Michael, Gabriel, Raphael and Uriel. The positions of the archangels in the camps, which are mirrored in the Jewish *Kriat Shema al ha-Mitah* prayer, do not relate to the directions and a set of elemental attributions.[7] This simple consecration of holy oil is not derived from the *Sepher Yetzirah*, but I have included it as it is relevant for use with other practices contained in this work.

You will need a white candle and some rose oil for this practice, which I created as a simple blessing for strength and wisdom. You can perform this exercise as frequently as you wish, and it can be used as a stand-alone practice or in combination with other exercises and meditations.

Face East and say:

Let Michael stand at my right
Let Gabriel stand at my left
Let Uriel sound the trumpet before me
Let Raphael set a crown upon my head

Light white candle, and say

Glory be upon my head
Truth be in my heart
As above, so below
I draw my wisdom from the Heavenly Shekinah

See a beam of blue light from above descending and bathing you in its radiance and say

And the Earthly Shekinah within

Draw the blue light into your heart and feel it uniting with the white light of the Shekinah within you, saying

United in Perfect Holy Intent

I Bless this sacred oil

Hold hands over the rose oil and see rays of blue and white energy passing from your heart down your arms and into your hands, and from your hands into the rose oil.

That as I anoint myself
I gain strength in all my endeavours

Anoint yourself with rose oil.

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[1] *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, c. 2150-2100 BCE, trans. Budge.

[2] I Kings 3:3.

[3] *On Abstinence*, Porphyry, C3rd CE.

[4] Shabbat 88b.

[5] *Symposia*, Methodius, C3rd CE.

[6] Exodus 30:26-30.

[7] They relate to the pillars of the Tree of Life. Thus Michael at the right is in the position of the Black Pillar (of Fire) and Gabriel at the left is in the position of the White Pillar (of Water). Raphael behind you relates to the Middle Pillar (of Air) and Uriel before you to the manifestation of divine power, for he bears the light, but also represents earth, showing the formula of *As above, so below*.

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